THOUGHTS ON VEDANTA

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THOUGHTS ON VEDANTA

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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THE VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY

The Vedanta Philosophy, as it is generally called at the present day, really comprises all the various sects that now exist in India. Thus there have been various interpretations, and to my mind they have been progressive, beginning with the dualistic or Dvaita and ending with the non-dualistic or Advaita. The word *Vedânta* literally means the end of the Vedas—the Vedas being the scriptures of the Hindus.[1] Sometimes in the

[1] The Vedas are divided mainly in two portions: the Karmakanda and the Jnanakanda—the work-portion and the knowledge-portion. To the Karmakanda belong the famous hymns and the rituals or Brahmanas. Those books which treat of spiritual matters apart from ceremonials are called Upanishads. The Upanishads belong to the Jnanakanda or knowledge-portion. It is not that all the Upanishads came to be composed as a separate portion of the Vedas. Some are interspersed among the rituals and at least one is in the Samhita or hymn-portion. Sometimes the term 'Upanishads' is applied to books which are not included in the Vedas—*e.g.* the Gita; but as a rule it is applied to the philosophical treatises scattered through the Vedas. These treatises have been collected and are called the Vedanta.

West, by the Vedas are meant only the hymns and rituals of the Vedas. But at the present time these parts have almost gone out of use and usually by the word *Vedas* in India, the Vedanta is meant. All our commentators, when they want to quote a passage from the scriptures, as a rule quote from the Vedanta, which has another technical name with the commentators—the Shrutis.[1] Now all the books known by the name of the Vedanta, were not entirely written after the ritualistic portions of the Vedas. For instance, one of them—the Isha Upanishad forms the fortieth chapter of the Yajur Veda, that being the oldest part of the Vedas. There are other Upanishads[2] which form portions of the Brah-

[1] The term 'Shruti'—meaning 'that which is heard,'—though including the whole of the Vedic literature, is chiefly applied by the commentators to the Upanishads.

[2] The Upanishads are said to be one hundred and eight in number. Their dates cannot be fixed with certainty, only it is certain that they are older than the Buddhistic movement. Though some of the minor Upanishads contain allusions indicating a later date, yet that does not prove the later date of the treatise, as, in very many cases in Sanskrit literature, the substance of a book, though of very ancient date, receives a coat-

manas or ritualistic writings; and the rest of the Upanishads are independent, not comprised in any of the Brahmanas or other parts of the Vedas; but there is no reason to suppose that they were entirely independent of other parts, for, as we well know, many of these have been lost entirely and many of the Brahmanas have become extinct. So it is quite possible that the independent Upanishads belonged to some Brahmanas, which in course of time fell into disuse, while the Upanishads remained. These Upanishads are also called Forest Books or Aranyakas.

The Vedanta, then, practically forms the scriptures of the Hindus, and all systems of philosophy that are orthodox, have to take it as their foundation. Even the Buddhists and Jains, when it suits their purpose, will quote a passage from the Vedanta as authority. All schools of philosophy in India, although they claim to have been based upon the Vedas, took different names for their systems. The last one, the system of Vyâsa, took its stand upon the doctrines of the Vedas more than the previous systems did and made an attempt to harmonize the preceding philosophies,

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ing, as it were, of later events in the hands of the sectarians, to exalt their particular sect.

such as the Sankhya and the Nyaya, with the doctrines of the Vedanta. So it is especially called the Vedanta Philosophy; and the Sutras or Aphorisms of Vyasa are, in modern India, the basis of the Vedanta Philosophy. Again, these Sutras of Vyasa have been variously explained by different commentators. In general there are three sorts of commentators[1] in

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[1] The commentaries are of various sorts—such as the Bhashya, Tika, Tippani, Churni, etc.—of which all, except the Bhashya, are explanations of the text or difficult words in the text. The Bhashya is not properly a commentary but the elucidation of a system of philosophy out of texts, the object being not to explain the words but to bring out a philosophy. So the writer of a Bhashya expands his own system taking texts as authorities for his system.

There have been various commentaries on the Vedanta. Its doctrines found their final expressions in the philosophical Aphorisms of Vyasa. This treatise, called the Uttara Mimamsa, is the standard authority of Vedantism,—nay, is the most authoritative exposition of the Hindu scriptures. The most antagonistic sects have been compelled, as it were, to take up the texts of Vyasa, and harmonize them with their own philosophy. Even in very ancient times, the commentators on the Vedanta philosophy formed themselves into the three celebrated Hindu sects of dualists, qualified

India now and from their interpretations have arisen three systems of philosophy and sects. One is the dualistic or Dvaita, a second is the qualified non-dualistic or Vishishtadvaita and a third is the non-dualistic or Advaita. Of these the dualistic and the qualified non-dualistic include the largest number of the Indian people. The non-dualists are comparatively few in number. Now I will try to lay before you the ideas that are contained in all these three sects; but before going on, I will make one remark—that these different Vedanta systems have one common psychology and that is the psychology of the Sankhya system. The Sankhya psychology is very much like the psychologies of the Nyaya and Vaisheshika systems, differing only in minor particulars.

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non-dualists and non-dualists. The ancient commentaries are perhaps lost; but they have been revived in modern times by the post-Buddhistic commentators—Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva. Shankara revived the non-dualistic form, Ramanuja the qualified non-dualistic form of the ancient commentator Bodhayana, and Madhva the dualistic form. In India the sects differ mainly in their philosophy; the difference in rituals is slight, the basis of their philosophy and religion being the same.

All the Vedantists agree on three points. They believe in God, in the Vedas as revealed and in cycles. We have already considered the Vedas. The belief about cycles is as follows: All matter throughout the universe is the outcome of one primal matter called Akasha; and all force, whether gravitation, attraction or repulsion, or life, is the outcome of one primal force called Prana. Prana acting on Akasha is creating or projecting[1] the universe. At the beginning of a cycle, Akasha is motionless, unmanifested. Then Prana begins to act, more and more, creating grosser and grosser forms out of Akasha,—plants, animals, men, stars, and so on. After an incalculable time this evolution ceases and involution begins, everything being resolved back through finer and finer forms into the original Akasha and Prana, when a new cycle follows. Now there is something beyond Akasha and Prana. Both can be resolved into a third thing called Mahat—the Cosmic Mind. This Cosmic Mind does not

[1] The word which is "creation" in your language is in Sanskrit exactly "projection", because there is no sect in India which believes in creation as it is regarded in the West,—a something coming out of nothing. What we mean by creation is projection of that which already existed.

create Akasha and Prana but changes itself into them.

We will now take up the beliefs about mind, soul and God. According to the universally accepted Sankhya psychology, in perception,—in the case of vision, for instance,—there are, first of all, the instruments or Karanas of vision—the eyes. Behind the instruments, the eyes, is the organ of vision or Indriya—the optic nerve and its centres, which is not the external instrument but without which the eyes will not see. More still is needed for perception. The mind or Manas must come and attach itself to the organ. And besides this, the sensation must be carried to the intellect or Buddhi—the determinative, reactive state of the mind. When the reaction comes from Buddhi, along with it flashes the external world and egoism. Here then is the will; but everything is not complete. Just as every picture, being composed of successive impulses of light, must be united on something stationary to form a whole, so all the ideas in the mind must be gathered and projected on something that is stationary relatively to the body and mind, that is, on what is called the Soul or Purusha or Atman.

According to the Sankhya philosophy, the

reactive state of the mind called Buddhi or intellect, is the outcome, the change, or a certain manifestation of the Mahat or Cosmic Mind. The Mahat becomes changed into vibrating thought and that becomes in one part changed into the organs and in the other part into the fine particles of matter. Out of the combination of all these the whole of this universe is produced. Behind even Mahat, the Sankhya conceives of a certain state which is called Avyaktam or unmanifested, where even the manifestation of mind is not present but only the causes exist. It is also called Prakriti. Beyond this Prakriti and eternally separate from it, is the Purusha, the Soul of the Sankhya, which is without attributes and omnipresent. The Purusha is not the doer but the witness. The illustration of the crystal is used to explain the Purusha. The latter is said to be like a crystal without any colour, before which different colours are placed, and then it seems to be coloured by the colours before it, but in reality it is not. The Vedantists reject the Sankhya ideas of the soul and nature. They claim that between them there is a huge gulf to be bridged over. On the one hand, the Sankhya system comes to nature, and then at once it has to jump over to the other side and come to the soul, which is en-

tirely separate from nature. How can these different colours, as the Sankhya calls them, be able to act on that Soul which by its nature is colourless? So the Vedantists, from the very first, affirm that this Soul and this Nature are one.[1] Even the dualistic Vedantists admit that the Atman or God is not only the efficient cause of this universe but also the material cause. But they only say so in so many words. They do not really mean it, for they try to escape from their conclusions in this way. They say there are three existences in this universe—God, soul and nature. Nature and soul are, as it were, the body of God and in this sense it may be said that God and the whole universe are one. But this nature and all these various souls remain different from each other through all eternity. Only at the beginn-

[1] The Vedanta and the Sankhya philosophy are very little opposed to each other. The Vedanta God developed out of the Sankhya's Purusha. All the systems take up the psychology of the Sankhya. Both the Vedanta and the Sankhya believe in the infinite soul, only the Sankhya believes there are many souls. According to the Sankhya, this universe does not require any explanation from outside. The Vedanta believes in one soul, which appears as many and we build on the Sankhya's analysis.

ing of a cycle do they become manifest and when the cycle ends, they become fine and remain in a fine state. The Advaita Vedantists—the non-dualists reject this theory of the soul and having nearly the whole range of the Upanishads in their favour, build their philosophy entirely upon them. All the books contained in the Upanishads have one subject, one task before them—to prove the following theme: "Just as by the knowledge of one lump of clay we have the knowledge of all the clay in the universe, so what is that, knowing which we know everything in the universe?" The idea of the Advaitists is to generalise the whole universe into one—that something which is really the whole of this universe. And they claim that this whole universe is one, that it is one Being manifesting itself in all these various forms. They admit that what the Sankhya calls nature, exists, but say that nature is God. It is this Being, the Sat, which has become converted into all this—the universe, man, soul, and everything that exists. Mind and Mahat are but the manifestations of that one Sat. But then the difficulty arises that this would be pantheism. How came that Sat which is unchangeable, as they admit (for that which is absolute is unchangeable), to be changed into that

which is changeable and perishable? The Advaitists here have a theory which they call Vivarta-Vada or apparent manifestation. According to the dualists and the Sankhyas, the whole of this universe is the evolution of primal nature. According to some of the Advaitists and some of the dualists, the whole of this universe is evolved from God. And according to the Advaitists proper, the followers of Shankaracharya, the whole universe is the *apparent* evolution of God. God is the material cause of this universe, but not really, only apparently. The celebrated illustration used, is that of the rope and the snake, where the rope appeared to be the snake, but was not really so. The rope did not really change into the snake. Even so this whole universe as it exists, is that Being. It is unchanged and all the changes we see in it are only apparent. These changes are caused by Desha, Kala and Nimitta (space, time and causation) or, according to a higher psychological generalisation, by Nama and Rupa (name and form). It is by name and form that one thing is differentiated from another. The name and form alone cause the difference. In reality they are one and the same. Again, it is not, the Vedantists say, that there is something as phenomenon and something as noumenon. The

rope is changed into the snake apparently only and when the delusion ceases, the snake vanishes. When one is in ignorance, he sees the phenomenon and does not see God. When he sees God, this universe vanishes entirely for him. Ignorance or Maya, as it is called, is the cause of all this phenomenon—the Absolute, the Unchangeable being taken as this manifested universe. This Maya is not absolute zero, not non-existence. It is defined as neither existence nor non-existence. It is not existence, because that can be said only of the Absolute, the Unchangeable and in this sense, Maya is non-existence. Again it cannot be said it is non-existence; for if it were, it could never produce the phenomenon. So it is something which is neither; and in the Vedanta philosophy it is called Anirvachaniya or the inexpressible. Maya then is the real cause of this universe. Maya gives the name and form to what Brahman or God gives the material; and the latter seems to have been transformed into all this. The Advaitists, then, have no place for the individual soul. They say individual souls are created by Maya. In reality they cannot exist. If there were only one existence throughout, how could it be that I am one, and you are one, and so forth? We are all one, and the cause of evil is

the perception of duality. As soon as I begin to feel that I am separate from this universe, then first comes fear and then comes misery. "Where one hears another, one sees another, that is small. Where one does not see another, where one does not hear another, that is the greatest, that is God. In that greatest is perfect happiness. In small thing there is no happiness."

According to the Advaita philosophy, then, this differentiation of matter, these phenomena, are, as it were, for a time, hiding the real nature of man; but the latter really has not been changed at all. In the lowest worm, as well as in the highest human being, the same divine nature is present. The worm form is the lower form in which the divinity has been more overshadowed by Maya; that is the highest form in which it has been least overshadowed. Behind everything the same divinity is existing and out of this comes the basis of morality. Do not injure another. Love every one as your own self, because the whole universe is one. In injuring another, I am injuring myself; in loving another, I am loving myself. From this also springs that principle of Advaita morality which has been summed up in one word,—self-abnegation. The Advaitist says, this little personalised self is the cause of all my misery.

This individualised self, which makes me different from all other beings, brings hatred and jealousy and misery, struggles and all other evils. And when this idea has been got rid of, all struggle will cease, all misery vanish. So this is to be given up. We must always hold ourselves ready, even to give up our lives for the lowest beings. When a man has become ready even to give up his life for a little insect, he has reached the perfection which the Advaitist wants to attain and at that moment when he has become thus ready, the veil of ignorance falls away from him and he will feel his own nature. Even in this life he will feel that he is one with the universe. For a time, as it were, the whole of this phenomenal world will disappear for him and he will realise what he is. But so long as the Karma of this body remains, he will have to live. This state, when the veil has vanished and yet the body remains for some time, is what the Vedantists call the Jivan-Mukti, the living freedom. If a man is deluded by a mirage for sometime, and one day the mirage disappears—if it comes back again the next day or at some future time, he will not be deluded. Before the mirage first broke, the man could not distinguish between the reality and the deception. But when it has once broken, as long

as he has organs and eyes to work with, he will see the image, but will no more be deluded. That fine distinction between the actual world and the mirage, he has caught, and the latter cannot delude him any more. So when the Vedantist has realized his own nature, the whole world has vanished for him. It will come back again, but no more the same world of misery. The prison of misery has become changed into Sat, Chit, Ananda,—Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute and the attainment of this is the goal of Advaita Philosophy.[1]

[1] The above Address was delivered before the Graduate Philosophical Society of Harvard University, on March 25, 1896.

VEDANTA AS A FACTOR IN CIVILISATION

(Extract from an address delivered at Airlie-lodge, Ridgway-gardens, England.)

People, who are capable of seeing only the gross external aspect of things, can perceive in the Indian nation only a conquered and suffering people, a race of dreamers and philosophers. They seem to be incapable of perceiving that in the spiritual realm India conquers the world. No doubt it is true, that just as the too active Western mind would profit by an admixture of Eastern introspection and the meditative habit, so the Eastern would benefit by a somewhat greater activity and energy. Still we must ask, what may be that Force which causes this afflicted and suffering people, the Hindu and the Jewish too (the two races from which have originated all the great religions of the world), to survive, when other nations perish ? The cause can only be their Spiritual Force. The Hindus are still living though silent, the Jews are more numerous today than when they lived in Palestine. The philosophy of India percolates throughout the whole civilised world, modifying and permeating as it goes. So

also in ancient times, her trade reached the shores of Africa, before Europe was known, and opened communications with the rest of the world, thus disproving the belief that Indians never went outside of their own country. It is remarkable also that the possession of India by a foreign power has always been a turning point in the history of that power, bringing to it wealth, prosperity, dominion and spiritual ideas. While the Western man tries to measure how much it is possible for him to possess and to enjoy, the Eastern seems to take the opposite course, and to measure how little of material possessions he can do with. In the Vedas we trace the endeavour of that ancient people to find God. In their search for Him they came upon different strata. Beginning with ancestor-worship, they passed on to the worship of Agni, the fire-god, of Indra, the god of thunder, and of Varuna, the God of gods. We find the growth of this idea of God—from many gods to one God, in all religions; its real meaning is that He is the chief of the tribal gods, Who creates the world, rules it and sees into every heart; the stages of growth lead up from a multiplicity of gods to monotheism. This anthropomorphic conception, however, did not satisfy the Hindus, it was too human for them who were

seeking the Divine. Therefore they finally gave up searching for God in the outer world of sense and matter and turned their attention to the inner world. Is there an inner world? And what is it? It is *Atman*, It is the Self, It is the only thing an individual can be sure of. If he knows himself, he can know the universe; and not otherwise. The same question was asked in the beginning of time, even in the Rig-Veda, in another form: 'Who or what existed from the beginning?' That question was gradually solved by the Vedanta philosophy. The *Atman* existed. That is to say, what we call the Absolute, the Universal Soul, the Self, is the Force by which from the beginning all things have been and are and will be manifested. While the Vedanta philosophers solved that question, they at the same time discovered the basis of ethics. Though all religions have taught ethical precepts, such as, 'Do not kill, do not injure; love your neighbour as yourself,' etc., yet none of these have given the reason. 'Why should I not injure my neighbour?' To this question there was no satisfactory or conclusive answer forthcoming, until it was evolved by the metaphysical speculations of the Hindus, who could not rest satisfied with mere dogmas. So the Hindus say that this

Atman is absolute and all-pervading, therefore infinite. There cannot be two infinites, for, they would limit each other and would become finite. Also each individual soul is a part and parcel of that Universal Soul, which is infinite. Therefore, in injuring his neighbour, the individual actually injures himself. This is the basic metaphysical truth underlying all ethical codes. It is too often believed that a person in his progress towards perfection passes from error to truth; that when he rejects one thought for another, he must necessarily reject the first. But no error can lead to truth. The soul passing through its different stages goes from truth to truth, and each stage is truth; it goes from lower truth to higher truth. This point may be illustrated in the following way. A man is journeying towards the sun and takes a photograph at each step. How different would be the first photograph from the second and still more from the third or the last, when he reaches the real sun ? But all these, though differing so widely from each other, are true, only they are made to appear different by the changing conditions of time and space. It is the recognition of this truth, which has enabled the Hindus to perceive the universal truth of all religions, from the lowest to the

highest; it has made them the only people who never had religious persecutions. The shrine of a Mahomedan saint, which is at the present day neglected and forgotten by Mahomedans, is worshipped by Hindus! Many instances may be quoted, illustrating the same spirit of tolerance. The Eastern mind could not rest satisfied till it had found that goal which is the end sought by all humanity, namely, Unity. The Western scientist seeks for unity in the atom or the molecule. When he finds it, there is nothing further for him to discover and so when we find that Unity of Soul or Self, which is called *Atman,* we can go no further. It becomes clear that everything in the sense-world is a manifestation of that One Substance. Further, the scientist is brought to the necessity of recognising metaphysics, when he supposes that atoms having neither breadth nor length yet become, when combined, the cause of extension, length and breadth. When one atom acts upon another, some medium is necessary. What is that medium ? It will be a third atom. If so, then the question still remains unanswered, for how do these two act on the third ? A manifest *reductio ad absurdum.* This contradiction in terms is also found in the hypothesis necessary to all

physical science, that a point is that which has neither parts nor magnitude, and a line has length without breadth. These cannot be either seen or conceived. Why ? Because they do not come within the range of the senses. They are metaphysical conceptions. So we see, it is finally the mind which gives the form to all perception. When I see a chair, it is not the real chair external to my eye which I perceive, but an external something plus the mental image formed. Thus even the materialist is driven to metaphysics in the last extremity.

THE SPIRIT AND INFLUENCE OF VEDANTA

(Delivered at the Twentieth Century Club of Boston, America.)

Before going into the subject of this afternoon, will you allow me to say a few words of thanks now that I have the opportunity. I have lived three years amongst you. I have travelled over nearly the whole of America, and as I am going back from here to my own country, it is meet that I should take this opportunity of expressing my gratitude in this Athens of America. When I first came to this country, after a few days, I thought I would be able to write a book on the nation. But after three years' stay here, I find I am not able to write even a page. On the other hand, I find in travelling in various countries that beneath the surface differences that we find in dress and food and little details of manners, man is man all the world over; the same wonderful human nature is everywhere represented. Yet there are certain characteristics, and in a few words I would like to sum up all my experiences here. In this land of America, no question is asked about a man's peculiarities.

If a man is a man, that is enough, and they take him into their hearts, and that is one thing I have never seen in any other country in the world.

I came here to represent a philosophy of India, which is called the Vedanta philosophy. This philosophy is very, very ancient; it is the outcome of that mass of ancient Aryan literature known by the name of the Vedas. It is, as it were, the very flower of all the speculations and experiences and analyses embodied in that mass of literature,—collected and culled through centuries. This Vedanta philosophy has certain peculiarities. In the first place, it is perfectly impersonal; it does not owe its origin to any person or prophet; it does not build itself around one man as a centre. Yet it has nothing to say against philosophies, which do build themselves around certain persons. In later days in India, other philosophies and systems arose, built around certain persons,—such as, Buddhism, or many of our present sects. They each have a certain leader to whom they owe allegiance, just as the Christians and the Mahomedans have. But the Vedanta philosophy stands as the background of all these various sects, and there is no fight and no antagonism between the Vedanta and any other system in the world.

One principle it lays down—and that, the Vedanta claims, is to be found in every religion in the world—that man is divine, that all this, which we see around us, is the outcome of that consciousness of the Divine. Everything that is strong and good and powerful in human nature is the outcome of that divinity, and though potential in many, there is no difference between man and man essentially, all being alike divine. There is, as it were, an infinite ocean behind, and you and I are so many waves, coming out of that infinite ocean; and each one of us is trying our best to manifest that infinite outside. So, potentially, each one of us has that infinite ocean of Existence, Knowledge and Bliss as our birthright, our real nature; and the difference between us is caused by the greater or lesser power to manifest that divine. Therefore the Vedanta lays down that each man should be treated not as what he manifests but as what he stands for. Each human being stands for the divine, and therefore every teacher should be helpful, not by condemning man, but by helping him to call forth the divinity that is within him.

It also teaches that all the vast mass of energy that we see displayed in society and in every plane of action, is really from inside out; and

therefore, what is called inspiration by other sects, the Vedantist begs the liberty to call the *expiration* of man. At the same time it does not quarrel with other sects; the Vedanta has no quarrel with those who do not understand this divinity of man. Consciously or unconsciously every man is trying to unfold that divinity.

Man is like an infinite spring, coiled up in a small box, and that spring is trying to unfold itself; and all the social phenomena that we see are the result of this trying to unfold; and all the competitions and struggles and evils that we see around us, are neither the causes of these unfoldments nor the effects. As one of our great philosophers says,—in the case of the irrigation of a field, the tank is somewhere up on a higher level, and the water is trying to rush into the field, and is barred by a gate. But as soon as the gate is opened, the water rushes in by its own nature; and if there is dust and dirt in the way, the water rolls over them. But dust and dirt are neither the result nor the cause of this unfolding of the divine nature of man. They are co-existent circumstances, and, therefore, can be remedied.

Now, this idea, claims the Vedanta, is to be found in every religion, whether in India or out-

side of it; only in some of them, the idea is expressed through mythology, and in others, through symbology. They claim that there has not been one religious inspiration, one manifestation of the divine man, however great, but it has been the expression of that infinite oneness in human nature; and all that we call ethics and morality and doing good to others, is also but the manifestation of this oneness. There are moments when every man feels that he is one with the universe, and he rushes forth to express it, whether he knows it or not. This expression of oneness is what we call love and sympathy, and it is the basis of all our ethics and morality. This is summed up in the Vedanta philosophy by the celebrated aphorism, *Tat tvam asi,* "Thou art That."

To every man, this is taught: Thou art one with this Universal Being, and as such, every soul that exists, is your soul and every body that exists, is your body; and in hurting any one you hurt yourself, in loving any one you love yourself. As soon as a current of hatred is thrown outside, whomsoever else it hurts, it also hurts yourself; and if love comes out from you, it is bound to come back to you. For I am the universe; this universe is my body. I am the Infinite, only I am not conscious of it now; but I am struggling

to get this consciousness of the Infinite, and perfection will be reached when full consciousness of this Infinite comes.

Another peculiar idea of the Vedanta is that we must allow this infinite variation in religious thought, and not try to bring everybody to the same opinion, because the goal is the same; as the Vedantist says in his poetical language:

"As so many rivers, having their source in different mountains, roll down, crooked or straight, and at last come into the ocean, so all these various creeds and religions, taking their start from different standpoints and running through crooked or straight courses, at last come unto Thee."

As a manifestation of that, we find that this most ancient philosophy has, through its influence, directly inspired Buddhism, the first missionary religion of the world, and indirectly it has also influenced Christianity, through the Alexandrians, the Gnostics, and the European philosophers of the middle ages. And later, influencing German thought, it has produced almost a revolution in the regions of philosophy and psychology. Yet all this mass of influence has been given to the world almost unperceived. As the gentle falling of the dews at night brings sup-

port to all vegetable life, so slowly and imperceptibly this divine philosophy has been spread through the world for the good of mankind. No march of armies has been used to preach this religon. In Buddhism, one of the greatest missionary religions of the world, we find inscriptions remaining of the great Emperor Asoka,—recording how missionaries were sent to Alexandria, to Antioch, to Persia, to China and to various other countries of the then civilized world. Three hundred years before Christ, instructions were given them not to revile other religions: "The basis of all religions is the same, wherever they are; try to help them all you can, teach them all you can, but do not try to injure them."

Thus in India there never was any religious persecution by the Hindus, but only that wonderful reverence, which they have for all the religions of the world. They sheltered a portion of the Hebrews, when they were driven out of their own country; and the Malabar Jews remain as a result. They received at another time, the remnant of the Persians, when they were almost annihilated; and they remain to this day, as a part of us and loved by us, as the modern Parsees of Bombay. There were Christians who claimed

to have come with St. Thomas, the disciple of Jesus Christ; and they were allowed to settle in India and hold their own opinions; and a colony of them is even now in existence in India. And this spirit of toleration has not died out. It will not and cannot die there.

This is one of the great lessons that the Vedanta has to teach. Knowing that consciously or unconsciously we are struggling to reach the same goal, why should we be impatient? If one man is slower than another, we need not be impatient, we need not curse him or revile him. When our eyes are opened and the heart is purified,—the work of the same divine influence, the unfolding of the same divinity in every human heart will become manifest; and then alone we shall be in a position to claim the brotherhood of man.

When a man has reached the highest, when he sees neither man nor woman, neither sex, nor creed, nor colour, nor birth, nor any of these differentiations, but goes beyond and finds that divinity which is the real man behind every human being, then alone he has reached the universal brotherhood and that man alone is a *Vedantist*.

Such are some of the practical historical results of the Vedanta.

VEDANTA AND PRIVILEGE

(*Delivered in London*)

We have nearly finished the metaphysical portion of the Advaita. One point, and perhaps the most difficult to understand, remains. We have seen so far that according to the Advaita theory, all we see around us, and the whole universe in fact, is the evolution of that one Absolute. This is called, in Sanskrit, Brahman. The Absolute has become changed into the whole of nature. But here comes a difficulty. How is it possible for the Absolute to change ? What made the Absolute to change ? By its very definition, the Absolute is unchangeable. Change of the unchangeable would be a contradiction. The same difficulty applies to those who believe in a Personal God. For instance, how did this creation arise ? It could not have arisen out of nothing; that would be a contradiction; something coming out of nothing, can never be. The effect is the cause in another form. Out of the seed, the big tree grows; the tree is the seed, plus air and water taken in. And if there were any method of testing the amount of the air and water taken to make the body of the tree, we

should find that it is exactly the same as the effect, the tree. Modern science has proved beyond doubt that it is so, that the cause is the effect in another form. The adjustment of the parts of the cause changes and becomes the effect. So, we have to avoid this difficulty of having a universe without a cause, and we are bound to admit that God has become the universe.

But we have avoided one difficulty, and landed in another. In every theory, the idea of God comes through the idea of unchangeability. We have traced historically how the one idea which we have always in mind in the search for God, even in its crudest form, is the idea of freedom; and the idea of freedom and of unchangeability are one and the same. It is the free alone which never changes, and the unchangeable alone which is free; for change is produced by something exterior to a thing, or within itself, which is more powerful than the surroundings. Everything which can be changed is necessarily bound by certain cause or causes, which cannot be unchangeable. Supposing God has become this universe, then God is here and has changed. And suppose the Infinite has become this finite universe, so much of the Infinite has gone, and therefore God is infinite, minus the universe. A

changeable God would be no God. To avoid this doctrine of pantheism, there is a very bold theory of the Vedanta. It is that this universe, as we know and think it, does not exist, that the unchangeable has not changed, that the whole of this universe is mere appearance and not reality, that this idea of parts, and little beings, and differentiations, is only apparent, not the nature of the thing itself. God has not changed at all, and has not become the universe at all. We see God as the universe, because we have to look through time, space and causation. It is time, space and causation that make this differentiation apparently, but not really. This is a very bold theory indeed. Now this theory ought to be explained a little more clearly. It does not mean idealism in the sense in which it is generally understood. It does not say that this universe does not exist; it exists, but at the same time, it is not what we take it for. To illustrate this, the example given by the Advaita is well known. In the darkness of night, a stump of a tree is looked upon as a ghost by some superstitious person, as a policeman by a robber, as a friend by some one waiting for his companion. In all these cases, the stump of the tree did not change, but yet there are apparent changes, and these

changes were in the minds of those who saw it. From the subjective side we can understand it better through psychology. There is something outside of ourselves, the true nature of which is unknown and unknowable to us; let us call it "x". And there is something inside, which is also unknown and unknowable to us; let us call it "y". The knowable is a combination of "x+y" and everything that we know, therefore, must have two parts, the "x" outside, and the "y" inside; and the "x+y" is the thing we know. So every form in the universe is partly our creation and partly something outside. Now what the Vedanta holds is that this "x" and this "y" are one and the same.

A very similar conclusion has been arrived at by some Western philosophers, especially by Herbert Spencer and some other modern philosophers. When it is said that the same power which is manifesting itself in the flower, is welling up in my own consciousness, it is the very same idea which the Vedantist wants to preach, that the reality of the external world and the reality of the internal world are one and the same. Even the ideas of the internal and the external exist by differentiation and do not exist in the thing themselves. For instance, if we develop another

sense, the whole world will change for us, showing that it is the subject which will change the object. If I change, the external world changes. Theory of the Vedanta, therefore, comes to this, that you and I and everything in the universe are that Absolute, not parts, but the whole. You are the whole of that Absolute, and so are all others, because the idea of part cannot come into it. These divisions, these limitations, are only apparent, not in the thing itself. I am complete and perfect and I was never bound. Boldly preaches the Vedanta, if you think you are bound, bound you will remain; if you know that you are free, free you are. Thus the end and aim of this philosophy is to let us know that we have been free always and shall remain free for ever. We never change, we never die and we are never born. What are all these changes then? What becomes of this phenomenal world? This world is admitted as an apparent world, bound by time, space and causation, and it comes to what is called, the *vivartavada* in Sanskrit, evolution of nature, and manifestation of the Absolute. The Absolute does not change or re-evolve. In the little amoeba is that infinite perfection latent. It is called amoeba from its amoeba covering and from the amoeba to the

perfect man the change is not in what is inside; that remains the same, unchangeable; but the change occurs in the covering.

There is a screen here and some beautiful scenery outside. There is a small hole in the screen through which we can only catch a glimpse of it. Suppose this hole begins to increase; as it grows larger and larger, more and more of the scenery comes into view, and when the screen has vanished, we come face to face with the whole of the scenery. This scene outside is the soul, and the screen between us and the scenery is *mâya*,—time, space and causation. There is a little hole somewhere through which I can catch only a glimpse of the soul. When the hole is bigger, I see more and more, and when the screen has vanished, I know that I am the soul. So changes in the universe are not in the Absolute; they are in nature. Nature evolves more and more, until the Absolute manifests Itself. In every one It exists; in some It is manifested more than in others; the whole universe is really one. In speaking of the Soul, to say that one is superior to another has no meaning. In speaking of the Soul, to say that man is superior to the animal or the plant, has no meaning; the whole universe is one. In plants the obstacle to Soul-manifestation is very great; in

animals a little less, in man still less, and in cultured, spiritual men still less, and in perfect men, it has vanished altogether. All our struggles, exercises, pains, pleasures, tears, and smiles, all that we do and think tend towards that goal, the tearing up of the screen, making the hole bigger, thinning the layers that remain between the manifestation and the reality behind. Our work, therefore, is not to make the Soul free but to get rid of the bondages. The sun is covered by layers of clouds but remains unaffected by them. The work of the wind is to drive the clouds away, and the more the clouds disappear, the more the light of the sun appears. There is no change in the Soul whatsoever—Infinite, Absolute, Eternal Knowledge, Bliss and Existence. Neither can there be birth nor death for the Soul. Dying and being born, reincarnation and going to heaven, cannot be for the Soul. These are different appearances, different mirages, different dreams. If a man who is dreaming of this world, now dreams of wicked thoughts and wicked deeds, after a certain time the thought of that very dream will produce the next dream. He will dream that he is in a horrible place being tortured. The man who is dreaming good thoughts and good deeds, after that period of dream is over, will dream he is in a

better place; and so go on from dream to dream. But the time will come when the whole of this dream will vanish. To every one of us there must come a time when the whole universe will be found to have been a mere dream, when we shall find that the soul is infinitely better than its surroundings. In this struggle through what we call our environments, there will come a time when we shall find that these environments were almost zero in comparison with the power of the Soul. It is only a question of time and time is nothing in the Infinite. It is as a drop in the ocean. We can afford to wait and be calm.

Consciously or unconsciously, therefore, the whole universe is going towards that goal. The moon is struggling to get out of the sphere of attraction of other bodies and will come out of it in the long run. But those who consciously strive to get free, hasten the time. One benefit from this theory we practically see, is that the idea of a real, universal love is only possible from this point of view. All are our fellow passengers, our fellow travellers—all life, plants, animals; not only my brother man, but my brother brute, my brother plant; not only my brother the good, but my brother the evil, my brother the spiritual and my brother the wicked. They are all going to

the same goal. All are in the same stream, each is hurrying towards that infinite freedom; we cannot stay the course, none can stay it, none can go back however he may try; he will be driven forward and in the end he will attain to freedom. Creation means the struggle to get back to freedom, the centre of our being, from where we have been thrown off, as it were. The very fact that we are here, shows that we are going towards the centre and the manifestation of this attraction towards the centre is what we call love.

The question is asked, from what does this universe come, in what does it remain, to what does it go back. And the answer is—from love it comes, in love it remains, back it goes unto love. Thus we are in a position to understand that whether one likes it or not, there is no going back for anyone. Everyone has to get to the centre, however he may struggle to go back. Yet if we struggle consciously, knowingly, it will smooth the passage, it will lessen the jar and quicken the time. Another conclusion we naturally arrive at from this, is that all knowledge and all power are within and not without. What we call nature is a reflecting glass; that is all the use of nature; and all knowledge is this reflection of the within on this glass of nature. What we call powers,

secrets of nature and force, are all within. In the external world are only a series of changes. There is no knowledge in nature; all knowledge comes from the human soul. Man manifests knowledge, discovers it within himself, which is pre-existing through eternity. Everyone is the embodiment of Knowledge, everyone is the embodiment of eternal Bliss and eternal Existence. The ethical effect is just the same, as we have seen elsewhere, with regard to equality. The idea of privilege is the bane of human life. Two forces, as it were, are constantly at work, one making caste, and the other breaking caste: in other words, the one making for privilege, the other breaking down privilege. And whenever privilege is broken down, more and more light and progress come to a race. This struggle we see all around us. Of course there is first the brutal idea of privilege, that of the strong over the weak. There is the privilege of wealth. If a man has more money than another, he wants a little privilege over those who have less. There is the still subtler and more powerful privilege of intellect: because one man knows more than others, he claims more privilege. And the last of all, and the worst, because the most tyrannical, is the privilege of spirituality. If some persons think, they know more of spiri-

tuality, of God, they claim a superior privilege over everyone else. They say, "Come down and worship us, ye common herds; we are the messengers of God, and you have to worship us." None can be Vedantists, and at the same time admit of privilege to anyone, either mental, physical, or spiritual, absolutely no privilege for anyone. The same power is in every man, the one manifesting more, the other less; the same potentiality is in everyone. Where is the claim to privilege? All knowledge is in every soul, even in the most ignorant; he has not manifested it, but perhaps he has not had the opportunity; the environments were not, perhaps, suitable to him; when he gets the opportunity he will manifest it. The idea that one man is born superior to another has no meaning in the Vedanta; that between two nations, one is superior and the other inferior has no meaning whatsoever. Put them in the same circumstances and see whether the same intelligence comes out or not. Before that you have no rigth to say that one nation is superior to another. And as to spirituality, no privilege should be claimed there. It is a privilege to serve mankind, for this is the worship of God; God is here, in all these human souls. He is the soul of man; what privilege can men ask? There are

no special messengers of God, never were, and never can be. All beings, great or small, are equally manifestations of God; the difference is only in the manifestation. The same eternal message, which has been eternally given comes to them little by little. The eternal message has been written in the heart of every being it is there already, and all are struggling to express it. Some in suitable circumstances express it a little better than others, but as bearers of the message they are all one. What claim to superiority is there? The most ignorant man, the most ignorant child, is as great a messenger of God as any that ever existed, and as great as any that are yet to come. For the infinite message is there imprinted once for all in the heart of every being. Wherever there is a being, that being contains the infinite message of the Most High. It is there. The work of the Advaita, therefore, is to break down all these privileges. It is the hardest work of all and curious to say, it has been less active than anywhere else in the land of its birth. If there is any land of privilege, it is the land which gave birth to this philosophy,—privilege for the spiritual man, as well as for the man of birth. There they have not so much privilege for money (that is one of the benefits,

I think), but privilege for birth and spirituality is everywhere.

Once a gigantic attempt was made to preach Vedantic ethics, which succeeded to a certain extent for several hundred years, and we know historically that those years were the best times of that nation. I mean the Buddhistic attempt to break down privilege. Some of the most beautiful epithets addressed to Buddha that I remember are, "Thou, the breaker of castes, destroyer of privileges, preacher of equality to all beings." So, he preached this one idea of equality. Its power has been misunderstood to a certain extent in the brotherhood of Sramans, where we find that hundreds of attempts have been made to make them into a church, with superiors and inferiors. You cannot make much of church when you tell people they are all gods. One of the good effects of Vedanta has been freedom of religious thought, which India enjoyed throughout all times of its history. It is something to glory in that it is the land where there was never a religious persecution, where people are allowed perfect freedom in religion.

This practical side of Vedanta, morality, is necessary as much today as it ever was; more necessary, perhaps, than it ever was, for all this

privilege-claiming has become tremendously intensified with the extension of knowledge. The idea of God and the devil, or Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, has a good deal of poetry in it. The difference between God and the devil is in nothing except in unselfishness and selfishness. The devil knows as much as God, is as powerful as God, only he has no holiness—that makes him a devil. Apply the same idea to the modern world; excess of knowledge and power, without holiness, makes human beings devils. Tremendous power is being acquired by the manufacture of machines and other appliances, and privilege is claimed today as it never has been claimed in the history of the world. That is why the Vedanta wants to preach against it, to break down this tyrannising over the souls of men.

Those of you who have studied the *Gitâ* will remember the memorable passages:

"He who looks upon the learned Brâhmana, upon the cow, the elephant, the dog or the outcast with the same eye, he indeed is the sage and the wise man." "Even in this life he has conquered heaven whose mind is firm fixed on this sameness, for the Lord is one and the same to all and the Lord is pure; therefore those who have this sameness for all, and are pure, are said to

be living in God." This is the gist of Vedantic morality, this sameness, for all. We have seen that it is the subjective world that rules the objective. Change the subject and the object is bound to change; purify yourself and the world is bound to be purified. This one thing requires to be taught now more than ever before. We are becoming more and more busy about our neighbours, and less and less about ourselves. The world will change if we change; if we are pure, the world will become pure. The question is why I should see evil in others. I cannot see evil unless I be evil. I cannot be miserable unless I am weak. Things that used to make me miserable when I was a child, do not do so now. The subject changed, so the object was bound to change;—so says the Vedanta. All these things which we call causes of misery and evil, we shall laugh at when we arrive at that wonderful state of equality, that sameness. This is what is called in Vedanta attaining to freedom. The sign of approaching that freedom is more and more of this sameness and equality.

In misery and happiness the same, in success and defeat the same—such a mind is nearing that state of freedom. That mind cannot be easily conquered. Minds that rise into waves at

the approach of every little thing, at the slightest provocation or danger, in what a state they must be! What to talk of greatness or spirituality, when these changes come over the mind? This unstable condition of the mind must be changed. We must ask ourselves how far we can be acted upon by the external world and how far we can stand on our own feet in spite of all the forces outside us. When we have succeeded in preventing all the forces in the world from throwing us off our balance, then alone we have attained to freedom and not before. That is salvation. It is here and nowhere else; it is this moment. Out of this idea, out of this fountain-head, all beautiful streams of thought have flowed upon the world, generally misunderstood in their expression, apparently contradicting each other. We find hosts of brave and wonderfully spiritual souls in every nation, taking to caves or forests for meditation, severing their connection with the external world. This is the one idea. And on the other hand, we find bright, illustrious beings coming into society trying to raise their fellowmen, the poor, the miserable. Apparently these two methods are contradictory. The man who lives in a cave apart from his fellow-beings, smiles contemptuously upon those who are working for

the regeneration of their follow-men. "How foolish," he says, "what work is there? The world of *mâya* will always remain the world of *mâya*; it cannot be changed." If I ask one of our priests in India, "Do you believe in Vedanta?" He says, "That is my religion; I certainly do; that is my life." "Very well, do you admit the equality of all life, the sameness of everything?" "Certainly, I do." The next moment, when a low-caste man approaches this priest, he jumps to one side of the street to avoid that man. "Why do you jump?" "Because his very touch would have polluted me." "But you were just saying, we are all the same, and you admit there is no difference in souls." He says, "Oh, that is in theory only for householders; when I go into a forest then I will look upon every one as the same." You ask one of your great men in England, of great birth and wealth, if he believes as a Christian, in the brotherhood of mankind, since all come from God. He answers in the affirmative, but in five minutes he shouts something uncomplimentary about the common herd. Thus, it has been a theory only for several thousand years and never came into practice. All understand it, declare it as the truth, but when you ask them to practise it, they say, it will take millions of years.

There was a certain king who had a huge number of courtiers, and each one of these courtiers declared he was ready to sacrifice his life for his master, and that he was the most sincere being ever born. In course of time, a Sannyasin came to the king. The king said to him that there never was a king who had so many sincere courtiers as he had. The Sannyasin smiled and said, he did not believe that. The king said, the Sannyasin could test it if he liked. So the Sannyasin declared that he would make a great sacrifice by which the king's reign would be extended very long, with the condition that there should be made a small tank into which each one of his courtiers should pour a pitcher of milk, in the dark of night. The king smiled and said, "Is this the test?" And he asked his courtiers to come to him, and told them what was to be done. They all expressed their joyful assent to the proposal and returned. In the dead of night they came and emptied their pitchers into the tank. But in the morning it was found full of water only. The courtiers were assembled and questioned about the matter. Each one of them had thought there would be so many pitchers of milk that his water would not be detected. Unfortunately most of us have the same idea and we do

our share of work as did the courtiers in the story.

There is so much idea of equality, says the priest, that my little privilege will not be detected. So say our rich men, so say the tyrants of every country. There is more hope for the tyrannised over, than for the tyrants. It will take a very long time for tyrants to arrive at freedom but less time for the others. The cruelty of the fox is much more terrible than the cruelty of the lion. The lion strikes a blow and is quiet for some time afterwards, but the fox trying persistently to follow his prey, never misses an opportunity. Priestcraft is in its nature cruel and heartless. That is why religion goes down where priestcraft arises. Says Vedanta, we must give up the idea of privilege; then will religion come. Before that there is no religion at all.

Do you believe what Christ says? "Sell all thou hast and give to the poor." Practical equality there; no trying to torture the texts, but taking the truth as it is. Do not try to torture texts. I have heard it said that that was preached only to the handful of Jews who listened to Jesus. The same argument will apply to other things also. Do not torture texts; dare to face truth as it is. Even if we cannot reach to it, let

us confess our weakness but let us not destory the ideal. Let us hope that we shall attain to it sometime, and strive for it. There it is—"Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and follow me." Thus, trampling on every privilege and everything in us that works for privilege, let us work for that knowledge which will bring the feeling of sameness towards all mankind. You think because you talk a little more polished language, that you are superior to the man in the street. Remember that when you are thinking this, you are not going towards freedom, but are forging a fresh chain for your feet. And, above all, if the pride of spirituality enters into you, woe unto you. It is the most awful bondage that ever existed. Neither can wealth, nor any other bondage of the human heart bind the soul so much as this. "I am purer than others," is the most awful idea that can enter into the human heart. In what sense are you pure? The God in you is the God in all. If you have not known this, you have known nothing. How can there be difference? It is all one. Every being is the temple of the Most High; if you can see that, good; if not, spirituality has yet to come to you.

PRIVILEGE

(*Delivered at the Sesame Club, London*)

Two forces seem to be working throughout nature. One of these is constantly differentiating, and the other is as constantly unifying; the one making more and more for separate individuals, the other, as it were, bringing the individuals into a mass, bringing out sameness in the midst of all this differentiation. It seems that the action of these two forces enters into every department of nature and of human life. On the physical plane, we always find the two forces most distinctly at work, separating the individuals, making them more and more distinct from other individuals, and again making them into species and classes, and bringing out similarities of expression and form. The same holds good as regards the social life of man. Since the time when society began, these two forces have been at work, differentiating and unifying. Their action appears in various forms, and is called by various names, in different places, and at different times. But the essence is present in all, one making for differentiation, and the other for sameness; the one making for caste and the other

breaking it down; one making for classes and privileges, and the other destroying them.

The whole universe seems to be the battle-ground of these two forces. On the one hand, it is urged that though this unifying process exists, we ought to resist it with all our might, because it leads towards death; that perfect unity is perfect annihilation, and that when the differentiating process, that is at work in this universe, ceases, the universe comes to an end. It is differentiation that causes the phenomena that are before us; unification would reduce them all to a homogeneous and lifeless matter. Such a thing, of course, mankind wants to avoid. The same argument is applied to all the things and facts that we see around us. It is urged that even in the physical body and social classification, absolute sameness would produce natural death and social death. Absolute samenes of thought and feeling would produce mental decay and degeneration. Sameness, therefore, is to be avoided. This has been the argument on the one side, and it has been urged in every country and in various times, with only a change of language. Practically it is the same argument which is urged by the Brâhmanas of India, when they want to uphold the divisions and castes, when they want to up-

hold the principles of a certain portion of the community, against everybody else. The destruction of caste, they declare, would lead to destruction of society, and boldly they produce the historical fact that theirs has been the longest-lived society. So they, with some show of force, appeal to this argument; with some show of authority they declare that that alone, which makes the individual live the longest life, must certainly be better than that which produces shorter lives.

On the other hand, the idea of oneness has had its advocates throughout all times. From the days of the Upanishads, Buddhas and Christs, and all other great preachers of religion, down to our present day, in the new political aspirations, and in the claims of the oppressed, and the down-trodden, and of all those who find themselves bereft of privileges,—comes out the one assertion of this unity and sameness. But human nature asserts itself. Those who have an advantage want to keep it, and if they find an argument, however one-sided and crude, they must cling to it. This applies to both sides.

Applied to metaphysics, this question also assumes another form. The Buddhist declares that we need not look for anything which brings unity in the midst of these phenomena, we ought

to be satisfied with this phenomenal world. This variety is the essence of life, however miserable and weak it may seem to be; we can have nothing more. The Vedantist declares that unity is the only thing that exists; variety is but phenomenal, ephemeral and apparent. "Look not to variety," says the Vedantist, "go back to unity." "Avoid unity; it is a delusion," says the Buddhist, "go to variety." The same differences of opinion in religion and metaphysics have come down to our own day, for, in fact the sum total of the principles of knowledge is very small. Metaphysics and metaphysical knowledge, religion and religious knowledge, reached their culmination five thousand years ago, and we are merely reiterating the same truths in different languages, only enriching them sometimes by the accession of fresh illustrations. So this is the fight even today. One side wants us to keep to the phenomenal, to all this variation, and points out, with great show of argument, that variation has to remain, for when that stops, everything is gone. What we mean by life has been caused by variation. The other side, at the same time, valiantly points to unity.

Coming to ethics, we find a tremendous departure. It is, perhaps, the only science which

makes a bold departure from this fight. For ethics is unity; its basis is love. It will not look at this variation; the one aim of ethics is this unity, this sameness. The highest ethical codes that mankind has discovered up to the present time, know no variation; they have no time to stop to look into it; their one end is to make for that sameness. The Indian mind being more analytical—I mean the Vedantic mind—found this unity as the result of all its analysis, and wanted to base everything upon this one idea of unity. But as we have seen in the same country, there were other minds (the Buddhistic), who could not find that unity anywhere. To them all truth was a mass of variation, there was no connection between one thing and another.

I remember a story told by Prof. Max Muller in one of his books, an old Greek story of how a Brâhmana visited Socrates in Athens. The Brâhmana asked, "What is the highest knowledge?" And Socrates answered—"To know man is the end and aim of all knowledge." "But how can you know man without knowing God?" replied the Brâhmana. The one side, the Greek side, which is represented by modern Europe, insisted upon the knowledge of man; the Indian side, mostly represented by the old reli-

gions of the world, insisted upon the knowledge of God. The one sees God in nature and the other sees nature in God. To us at the present time, perhaps, has been given the privilege of standing aside from both these aspects, and taking an impartial view of the whole. This is a fact that variation exists, and so it must, if life is to be. This is also a fact that in and through these variations unity must be perceived. This is a fact that God is perceived in nature. But it is also a fact that nature is perceived in God. The knowledge of man is the highest knowledge, and only by knowing man can we know God. This is also a fact that the knowledge of God is the highest knowledge, and knowing God alone we can know man. Apparently contradictory though these statements may appear, they are the necessity of human nature. The whole universe is a play of unity in variety, and of variety in unity. The whole universe is a play of differentiation and oneness; the whole universe is a play of the finite in the Infinite. We cannot take one without granting the other. But we cannot take them both as facts of the same perception, as facts of the same experience; yet in this way it will always go on.

Therefore, coming to our more particular pur-

pose, which is religion, rather than ethics, a state of things where all variation has died down, giving place to a uniform, dead homogeneity, is impossible so long as life lasts. Nor is it desirable. At the same time, there is the other side of the fact, viz. that this unity already exists. That is the peculiar claim,—not that this unity has to be made, but that it already exists, and that you could not perceive the variety at all without it. God is not to be made, but He already exists. This has been the claim of all religions. Whenever one has perceived the finite, he has also perceived the Infinite. Some laid stress on the finite side, and declared that they perceived the finite without; others laid stress on the Infinite side, and declared they perceived the Infinite only. But we know that it is a logical necessity that we cannot perceive the one without the other. So the claim is that this sameness, this unity, this perception—as we may call it—is not to be made, it already exists, and is here. We have only to recognise it, to understand it. Whether we know it or not, whether we can express it in clear language or not, whether this perception assumes the force and clearness of a sense-perception or not, it is there. For we are bound by the logical necessity of our minds to confess that it is there,

else the perception of the finite would not be. I am not speaking of the old theory of substance and qualities, but of oneness; that in the midst of all this mass of phenomena, the very fact of the consciousness that you and I are different, brings to us at the same moment the consiousness that you and I are not different. Knowledge would be impossible without that unity. Without the idea of sameness there would be neither perception nor knowledge. So both run side by side.

Therefore the absolute sameness of conditions, if that be the aim of ethics, appears to be impossible. That all men should be the same, could never be, however we might try. Men will be born differentiated; some will have more power than others; some will have natural capacities, others not; some will have perfect bodies, others not. We can never stop that. At the same time, ring in our ears the wonderful words of morality, proclaimed by various teachers,—"Thus, seeing the same God equally present in all, the sage does not injure Self by the Self, and thus reaches the highest goal. Even in this life they have conquered heaven whose minds are firmly fixed on this sameness; for God is pure, and God is the same to all. Therefore such are said to be

living in God." We cannot deny that this is the real idea; yet at the same time comes the difficulty that the sameness as regards external positions can never be attained.

But what can be attained is elimination of privilege. This is really the work before the whole world. In all social lives, there has been that one fight in every race, and in every country. The difficulty is not that one body of men are naturally more intelligent than another, but whether this body of men, because they have the advantage of intelligence, should take away even physical enjoyment from those who do not possess that advantage. The fight is to destroy that privilege. That some will be stronger physically than others, and will thus naturally be able to subdue or defeat the weak, is a self-evident fact; but that because of this strength they should gather unto themselves all the attainable happiness of this life, is not according to law, and the fight has been against it. That some people, through natural aptitude, should be able to accumulate more wealth than others, is natural, but that on account of this power to acquire wealth they should tyrannise, and ride roughshod over those who cannot acquire so much wealth, is not a part of the law, and the fight

has been against that. The enjoyment of advantage over another is privilege, and throughout ages, the aim of morality has been its destruction. This is the work which tends towards sameness, towards unity, without destroying variety.

Let all these variations remain eternally; it is the very essence of life. We shall all play in this way eternally. You will be wealthy and I shall be poor; you will be strong and I shall be weak; you will be learned and I ignorant; you will be very spiritual and I less so. But what of that? Let us remain so, but because you are physically or intellectually stronger, you must not have more privilege than I, and that you have more wealth is no reason why you should be considered greater than I, for that sameness is here, in spite of the different conditions.

The work of ethics has been, and will be in the future, not the destruction of variation, and the establishment of sameness in the external world—which is impossible, for it would bring death and annihilation—but to recognise the unity in spite of all these variations, to recognise the God within, in spite of everything that frightens us, to recognise that infinite strength as the property of everyone, in spite of all apparent weakness,

and to recognise the eternal, infinite, essential purity of the soul in spite of everything to the contrary that appears on the surface. This we have to recognise. Taking one side alone, one-half only of the position, is dangerous and liable to lead to quarrels. We must take the whole thing as it is, stand on it as our basis and work it out in every part of our lives, as individuals and as unit members of society.

STEPS OF HINDU PHILOSOPHIC THOUGHT

The first group of religious ideas that we see coming up—I mean recognised religious ideas, and not the very low ideas, which do not deserve the name of religion—all include the idea of inspiration, and revealed books and so forth. The first group of religious ideas start with the idea of God. Here is the universe, and this universe is created by a certain Being. Everything that is in this universe has been created by Him. Along with that, at a later stage, comes the idea of soul, that there is this body, and something inside this body which is not the body. This is the most primitive idea of religion that we know. We can find a few followers of that in India, but it was given up very early. The Indian religions take a peculiar start. It is only by strict analysis, and much calculation and conjecture, that we can ever think that that stage existed in Indian religions. The tangible state in which we find them is the next step, not the first one. At the earliest step the idea of creation is very peculiar, and it is that the whole universe is created out of zero, at the will of God; that all this universe did not

exist, and out of this nothingness all this has come. In the next stage we find this conclusion is questioned. How can existence be produced out of non-existence? At the first step in the Vedanta this question is asked. If this universe is existent, it must have come out of something, because it was very easy to see that nothing comes out of nothing anywhere. All work that is done by human hands requires materials. If a house is built, the material was existing before, if a boat is made, the material existed before, if any implements are made, the materials were existing before. So the effect is produced. Naturally therefore, the first idea that this world was created out of nothing, was rejected, and some material out of which this world was created was wanted. The whole history of religion, in fact, is this search after material. Out of what has all this been produced? Apart from the question of the efficient cause or God, apart from the question that God created the universe, the great question of all questions is, out of what did He create it? All the philosophies are turning, as it were, on this question. One solution is that Nature, God and soul are eternal existences, as if three lines are running parallel eternally, of which Nature and soul comprise what they call

the dependent and God the independent Reality. Every soul like every particle of matter, is perfectly dependent on the will of God. Before going to the other steps we will take up the idea of soul, and then find that with all the Vedantic philosophers, there is one tremendous departure from all Western philosophy. All of them have a common psychology. Whatever their philosophy may have been, their psychology is the same in India—the old Sankhya psychology. According to this, perception occurs by the transmission of the vibrations which first come to the external sense-organs, from the external to the internal organs, from the internal organs to the mind, from the mind to the *buddhi*, from the *buddhi* or intellect to something which is a unit, which they call the Atman. Coming to modern physiology, we know that it has found centres for all the different sensations. First it finds the lower centres and then a higher grade of centres, and these two centres exactly correspond with the internal organs and the mind, but not one centre has been found which controls all the other centres. So physiology cannot tell what unifies all these centres. Where do the centres get united? The centres in the brain are all different, and there is not one centre which con-

trols all the other centres; therefore, so far as it goes, the Indian psychology stands unchallenged upon this point. We must have this unification, something upon which the sensations will be reflected, to form a complete whole. Until there is that something, I cannot have any idea of you or a picture or anything else. If we had not that unifying something, we would only see, then after a while breathe, then hear, and so on, and while I heard a man talking I would not see him at all, because all the centres are different.

This body is made of particles which we call matter, and it is dull and insentient. So is what the Vedantists call the fine body. The fine body, according to them, is a material but transparent body, made of a very fine particles, so fine that no microscope can see them. What is the use of that? It is the receptacle of the fine forces. Just as this gross body is the receptacle of the gross forces, so the fine body is the receptacle of the fine forces which we call thought in its various modifications. First is the body which is gross matter with gross force. Force cannot exist without matter. It must require some matter to exist, so the grosser forces work in the body; and those very forces become finer; the very force, which is working in a gross form, works in a fine form,

and becomes thought. There is no distinction between them, simply one is the gross and the other the fine manifestation of the same thing. Neither is there any distinction between this fine body and the gross body. The fine body is also material, only very fine matter; and just as this gross body is the instrument that works the gross forces, so the fine body is the instrument that works the fine forces. From where do all these forces come? According to Vedanta philosophy, there are two things in Nature, one of which they call *âkâsha,* which is the substance, infinitely fine, and the other they call *prâna,* which is the force. Whatever you see, or feel, or hear, as air, earth, or anything, is material—the product of *âkâsha.* It goes on and becomes finer and finer, or grosser and grosser, changing under the action of *prâna.* Like *âkâsha, prâna* is omnipresent, and interpenetrating everything. *Akâsha* is like the water, and everything else in the universe is like blocks of ice, made out of that water, and floating in the water, and *prâna* is the power that changes this *âkâsha* into all these various forms. The gross body is the instrument made out of *âkâsha,* for the manifestation of *prâna* in gross forms, as muscular motion, or walking, sitting, talking, and so forth. That fine body is also made of *âkâsha,*

a very fine form of *âkâsha,* for the manifestation of the same *prâna* in the finer form of thought. So, first there is this gross body. Beyond that, is this fine body, and beyond that, is the *jiva,* the real man. Just as the nails can be pared off many times and yet are still part of our bodies, not different, so is our gross body related to the fine. It is not that a man has a fine and also a gross body; it is the one body, only the part which endures longer is the fine body, and that which dissolves soon is the gross. Just as I can cut this nail any number of times, so millions of times I can shed this gross body, but the fine body will remain. According to the dualists, the *jiva* or the real man, is very fine, minute. So far we see that man is a being, who has first a gross body, which dissolves very quickly, then a fine body which remains through aeons, and then *jiva.* This *jiva,* according to the Vedanta philosophy, is eternal; just as God is eternal Nature is also eternal, but changefully eternal. The material of Nature, *prâna* and *âkâsha,* is eternal, but it is changing into different forms eternally. But the *jiva* is not manufactured, either of *âkâsha,* or *prâna*; it is immaterial and therefore will remain for ever. It is not the result of any combination of *prâna* and *âkâsha,* and whatever

is not the result of combination, will never be destroyed, because destruction is going back to causes. The gross body is a compound of *akâsha* and *prâna* and therefore will be decomposed. The fine body will also be decomposed, after a long time, but the *jiva* is simple, and will never be destroyed. It was never born for the same reason. Nothing simple can be born. The same argument applies. That which is a compound only can be born. The whole of Nature comprising millions and millions of souls is under the will of God. God is all-pervading, omniscient, formless, and He is working through Nature day and night. The whole of it is under His control. He is the eternal Ruler. So say the dualists. Then the question comes, if God is the ruler of this universe, why did He create such a wicked universe, why must we suffer so much? They say, it is not God's fault. It is our fault that we suffer. Whatever we sow we reap. He did not do anything to punish us. Man is born poor, or blind, or some other way. What is the reason? He had done something before he was born that way. The *jiva* has been existing for all time, was never created. It has been doing all sorts of things all the time. Whatever we do reacts upon us. If we do good, we shall have happiness, and if evil,

unhappiness. So the *jiva* goes on enjoying and suffering and doing all sorts of things.

What comes after death? All these Vedanta philosophers admit that this *jiva* is by its own nature pure. But ignorance covers its real nature, they say. As by evil deeds it has covered itself with ignorance, so by good deeds it becomes conscious of its own nature again. Just as it is eternal, so its nature is pure. The nature of every being is pure.

When through good deeds all its sins and misdeeds have been washed away, then the *jiva* becomes pure again and when it becomes pure it goes to what is called *Devayana.* Its organ of speech enters the mind. You cannot think without words. Wherever there is thought there must be words. As words enter the mind, so the mind is resolved into the *prâna* and the *prâna* into the *jiva.* Then the *jiva* gets quickly out of the body and goes to the solar regions. This universe has sphere after sphere. This earth is the world sphere, in which are moons, suns and stars. Beyond that there is the solar sphere, and beyond that another which they call the lunar sphere. Beyond that there is the sphere which they call the sphere of lightning, the electric sphere, and when the *jiva* goes there, there comes another

jiva, already perfect, to receive it, and takes it to another world, the highest heaven, called the *Brahmaloka*, where the *jiva* lives eternally, no more to be born or to die. It enjoys through eternity, and gets all sorts of powers, except the power of creation. There is only one ruler of the universe, and that is God. No one can become God; the dualists maintain that if you say you are God, it is a blasphemy. All powers except the creative come to the *jiva*, and if it likes to have bodies and work in different parts of the world, it can do so. If it orders all the gods to come before it, if it wants its forefathers to come, they all appear at its command. Such are its powers that it never feels any more pain, and if it wants, it can live in the *Brahmaloka* through all eternity. This is the highest man, who has attained the love of God, who has become perfectly unselfish, perfectly purified, who has given up all desires, and who does not want to do anything except worship and love God. There are others that are not so high, who do good works, but want some reward. They say they will give so much to the poor, but want to go to heaven in return. When they die, what becomes of them? The speech enters the mind, the mind enters the *prâna*, the *prâna* enters the *jiva*, and the *jiva* gets

out, and goes to the lunar sphere, where it has a very good time for a long period. There it enjoys happiness, so long as the effect of its good deeds endures. When the same is exhausted, it descends and once again enters life on earth according to its deserts. In the lunar sphere, the *jiva* becomes what we call a god, or what the Christians, or Mahomedans call an angel. These gods are the names of certain positions; for instance, Indra, the king of the gods, is the name of a position; thousands of men get to that position. When a virtuous man who has performed the highest of Vedic rites dies, he becomes a king of the gods; by that time the old king has gone down again, and become man. Just as kings change here, so the gods, the Devas, also have to die. In heaven they will all die. The only deathless place is *Brahmaloka,* where alone there is no birth and death. So the *jivas* go to heaven, and have a very good time, except now and then when the demons give them chase. In our mythology it is said there are demons, who sometimes trouble the gods. In all mythologies, you read how these demons and the gods fought, and the demons sometimes conquered the gods, although many times, it seems, the demons did not do so many wicked things as the gods. In all

mythologies, for instance, you find the Devas fond of women. So after their reward is finished, they fall down again, come through the clouds, through the rains, and thus get into some grain or plant and find their way into the human body, when the grain or plant is eaten by men. The father gives them the material out of which to get a fitting body. When the material suits them no longer, they have to manufacture other bodies. Now there are the very wicked fellows, who do all sorts of diabolical things; they are born again as animals, and if they are very bad, they are born as very low animals or become plants or stones.

In the Deva form they make no karma at all; only man makes karma. Karma means work which will produce effect. When a man dies and becomes a Deva, he has only a period of pleasure, and during that time, makes no fresh karma; it is simply a reward for his past good karma. When the good karma is worked out, then the remaining karma begins to take effect, and he comes down to earth. He becomes man again, and if he does very good works, and purifies himself, he goes to *Brahmaloka* and comes back no more.

The animal is a state of sojourn for the *jiva* evolving from lower forms. In course of time the

animal becomes man. It is a significant fact that as the human population is increasing, the animal population is decreasing. The animal souls are all becoming men. So many species of animals have become men already. Where else have they gone?

In the Vedas, there is no mention of hell. But our Puranas, the later books of our Scriptures, thought that no religion could be complete unless hells were attached to it, and so they invented all sorts of hells. In some of these, men are sawed in half, and continually tortured, but do not die. They are continually feeling intense pain, but the books are merciful enough to say that it is only for a period. But karma is worked out in that state and then they come back on earth, and get another chance. So this human form is the great chance. It is called the karma-body, in which we decide our fate. We are running in a huge circle, and this is the point in the circle which determines the future. So this is considered the most important form that there is; man is greater than the gods.

So far with dualism, pure and simple. Next comes the higher Vedantic philosophy which says, that this cannot be. God is both the material and the efficient cause of this universe. If you say

there is a God who is an infinite Being, a soul which is also infinite, and a Nature which is also infinite, you can go on multiplying infinities without limit which is simply absurd; you smash all logic. So God is both the material and the efficient cause of the universe; He projects this universe out of Himself. Then how is it, that God has become these walls, and this table, that God has become the pig, and murderer, and all the evil things in the world? We say that God is pure. How can He become all these degenerate things? Our answer is, just as I am a soul and have a body, and in a sense, this body is not different from me, yet I, the real I, in fact, am not the body. For instance, I say, I am a child, a young man, or an old man, but my soul has not changed. It remains the same soul. Similarly, the whole universe comprising all Nature, and an infinite number of souls, is, as it were, the infinite body of God. He is interpenetrating the whole of it. He alone is unchangeable, but Nature changes, and soul changes. He is unaffected by changes in Nature and soul. In what way does Nature change? In its forms; it takes fresh forms. But the soul cannot change that way. The soul contracts and expands in knowledge. It contracts by evil deeds. Those deeds which contract the real

natural knowledge and purity of the soul, are called evil deeds. Those deeds, again, which bring out the natural glory of the soul, are called good deeds. All these souls were pure, but they have become contracted; through the mercy of God, and by doing good deeds, they will expand and recover their natural purity. Every one has the same chance, and in the long run, must get out. But this universe will not cease, because it is eternal. This is the second theory. The first is called dualism. The second holds that there are God, soul and Nature, and soul and Nature form the body of God, and therefore these three form one unit. It represents a higher stage of religious development and goes by the name of qualified monism. In dualism, the universe is conceived as a large machine set going by God, while in qualified monism, it is conceived as an organism, interpenetrated by the Divine Self.

The last are the non-dualists. They raise the question also, that God must be both the material and the efficient cause of this universe. As such, God has become the whole of this universe and there is no going against it. And when these other people say that God is the soul, and the universe is the body, and the body is changing, but God is changeless, the non-dualists say, all this

is nonsense. In that case what is the use of calling God the material cause of this universe? The material cause is the cause become effect; the effect is nothing but the cause in another form. Wherever you see an effect, it is the cause reproduced. If the universe is the effect, and God the cause, it must be the reproduction of God. If you say that the universe is the body of God, and that the body becomes contracted and fine and becomes the cause, and out of that the universe is evolved, the non-dualists say that it is God Himself who has become this universe. Now comes a very fine question. If this God has become this universe, you and all these things are God. Certainly. This book is God, everything is God. My body is God, and my mind is God, and my soul is God. Then why are there so many *jivas*? Has God become divided into millions of *jivas*? Does that one God appear as millions of *jivas*? Then how did it become so? How can that infinite power and substance, the one Being of the universe, become divided? It is impossible to divide infinity. How can that pure Being become this universe? If He has become the universe, He is changeful, and if He is changeful, He is part of Nature, and whatever is Nature and changeful, is born and dies. If our God is change-

ful, He must die some day. Take note of that. Again, how much of God has become this universe? If you say X (the unknown algebraical quantity), then God is God minus X now, and therefore, not the same God as before this creation, because so much has become this universe. So the non-dualists say, "This universe does not exist at all; it is all illusion. The whole of this universe, these Devas, gods, angels and all the other beings born and dying, all this infinite number of souls coming up and going down, are all dreams." There is no *jiva* at all. How can there be many? It is the one Infinite. As the one sun reflected on various pieces of water, appears to be many, and millions of globules of water reflect so many millions of suns, and in each globule will be a perfect image of the sun, yet there is only one sun. So, are all these *jivas* but reflections in different minds. These different minds are like so many different globules, reflecting this one Being. God is being reflected in all these different *jivas*. But a dream cannot be without a reality, and that reality is that one Infinite Existence. You, as body, mind, or soul, are a dream, but what you really are, is Existence, Knowledge, Bliss. You are the God of this universe. You are creating the whole universe and drawing it in. Thus says the

Advaitist. So all these births and rebirths, coming and going, are the figments of *Maya*. You are infinite. Where can you go? The sun, the moon, and the whole universe are but drops in your transcendent nature. How can you be born or die? I never was born, never will be born, I never had father or mother, friends or foes, for I am Existence, Knowledge, Bliss Absolute. I am He, I am He. So, what is the goal, according to this philosophy? That those who receive this knowledge are one with the universe. For them, all heavens and even *Brahmaloka* are destroyed, the whole dream vanishes, and they find themselves the eternal God of the universe. They attain their real individuality with its infinite knowledge and bliss and become free. Pleasures in little things cease. We are finding pleasure in this little body, in this little individuality. How much greater the pleasure when this whole universe is my body! If there is pleasure in one body, how much more when all bodies are mine. Then is freedom attained. And this is called Advaita, the non-dualistic Vedanta Philosophy.

These are the three steps which Vedanta Philosophy has taken, and we cannot go any further, because we cannot go beyond unity. When a science reaches a unity, it cannot by any manner

of means go any further. You cannot go beyond this idea of the Absolute.

All people cannot take up this Advaita phillosophy; it is hard. First of all, it is very hard to understand it intellectually. It requires the sharpest of intellects, a bold understanding. Secondly, it does not suit the vast majority of people. So there are these three steps. Begin with the first one. Then by thinking of that and understanding it, the second will open itself. Just as a race advances, so individuals have to advance. The steps which the human race has taken to reach to the highest pinnacles of religious thought, every individual will have to take. Only, while the human race took millions of years to reach from one step to another, individuals may live the whole life of the human race in a much shorter duration. But each one of us will have to go through these steps. Those of you who are non-dualists, look back to the period of your lives when you were strong dualists. As soon as you think you are a body and a mind, you will have to take the whole of this dream. If you take one portion, you must take the whole. The man who says, here is this world, and there is no God (personal), is a fool; because if there is a world, there will have to be a cause, and that is what

is called God. You cannot have an effect without knowing that there is a cause. God will only vanish when this world vanishes; then, you will become God (absolute) and this world will be no longer for you. So long as the dream, that you are a body, exists, you are bound to see yourself as being born and dying; but as soon as that dream vanishes, so will the dream vanish that you are being born and dying, and so will the other dream, that there is a universe, vanish. That very thing which we now see as the universe, will appear to us as God (absolute), and that very God who has so long been external, will appear to be internal, as our own Self.

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